Incorporating Social justice materials and technologies into existing curricula to enhance the experience of undergraduate, first year, Italian learners

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1. When Teachers move beyond the textbook: implementing social justice in the L2 classroom

Language learning allows us to connect to the world and each other in meaningful, creative, and personal ways. As language educators, we all thrive to help our learners establish these connections so that our students remain engaged in the process of learning. However, finding the right pedagogical tools, balancing the boundaries of textbooks, while also meeting the language proficiency standards, can greatly obscure our primary objective of serving the needs of our students. Scholars have suggested teaching critical thinking, (self) reflection (Kramsch) and providing the tools for learners to reflect on the world through a critical lens (MLA) that can contribute to the creation of meaningful personal connections. Visual media have many affordances for this intent, yet they are often used for entertainment or enrichment purposes (Cope and Kalantzis). With the affordances of technology and text-based analysis, language instructors as facilitators can provide new ways for L2 learners to become active citizens of the world and promoters of social change (Reagan and Osborn). One way to achieve these goals is to use multiliteracies approaches (Paesani et al.) paired with social justice (Randolph and Johnson). Studies often use these frameworks separately, and publications on the development of activities incorporated into existing curricula are still scarce.

As a response, we incorporated activities with a variety of multimodal genres addressing marginalized sociocultural discourses in the existing Italian curricula, developed, and used in live online and face to face, undergraduate, Italian beginner level language courses during the Spring of 2021 and 2022. In this paper we provide: 1) a rationale of the pedagogical approaches of multiliteracies and transformative learning paired with social justice; 2) the materials we developed using different genres and technology tools, 3) concrete examples of how learners engaged with them; and 4) our reflections on the piloted materials. This paper contributes to the conversation of concrete teaching practices to adopt when incorporating social justice topics in beginner Italian language teaching, even in the case of already existing curricula.

2. Background

Multiliteracies approaches emphasize meaningful language use through text-based learning activities. The activities presented here move beyond a view of language as decontextualized
from meaningful cultural topics; instead, language is viewed as a multilayered system of communication that conveys a variety of interrelated meanings and intersemiotic relationships. The four abilities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening are not viewed as separate but integrated throughout the tasks that students complete. Reading texts, for instance, is an interactive and collaborative process developed through activities that allow students to observe, make predictions and use their “existing knowledge to make sense of new information” (Paesani et al. 140).

Exposing L2 learners to a diversity of Italian sociocultural scenarios found on a variety of social media platforms, helps them feel more connected not only to the target culture but also to the world around them. With the purpose of avoiding cultural generalizations and of, instead, providing a view of culture as relational (Michelson), the texts that student experience contribute to their interpretation of culture as mobile and integral to language, rather than compartmentalized as two separate entities.

One of the goals of the multiliteracies framework is to move past the view that students at the beginner and elementary levels are not ready to engage in difficult conversations or to be exposed to complex topics and multimodal texts simply because they have a lower level of proficiency in the L2 (Paesani et al., Michelson). Instead, students can use multiple languages, signs and modes when engaging in a variety of texts in the L2; develop strategies to experience and interpret the new; critically analyze and reflect on the new knowledge; and apply it creatively while also developing their agentive selves.

A pedagogy of multiliteracies (Paesani et al.) paired with a social justice framework (Randolph and Johnson) provides new ways of including a variety of texts and discourses focused on complex topics, such as citizenship, immigration, belonging, gender roles, that are often intentionally excluded from the elementary L2 Italian curriculum. Introducing these topics through challenging questions or dilemmas where there is no right or wrong answers, is the first step toward a transformative learning experience that encourages students to critically reflect on their world views and to personally connect to real-world issues by learning with and from others (Taylor and Cranton). As a result of their engagement learners may develop their sense of self as promoters of social change in a diverse world and society.

For students to be able to bring their background knowledge and critical reflections on social justice topics throughout the course activities, they can use both their L1 and L2 and engage in translanguaging practices. This approach helps them expand their learning opportunities and empower their experience as multilingual subjects. By doing so, it allows us to move beyond the ideological divides between L1 and L2 in the language classroom (Cenoz and Gorter, Li). Using these theoretical frameworks together, we developed and implemented materials for our beginner Italian classes that we are going to discuss in detail in the following section.

3. Materials used in the beginner Italian classes
We embraced the pedagogical approaches of multiliteracies and social justice, and transformative learning to move beyond the only goal of language proficiency and craft more
meaningful experiences for our learners. We now describe the specific materials implemented in our elementary Italian classes, and the various steps that we took to enrich our existing curriculum. First, we reviewed the five chapters of the *Avanti* textbook that are to be covered in the course. We particularly looked at images, general topics, cultural references, and grammar points presented in each chapter. Then, we agreed on possible social justice topics that could best relate to and expand on the already existing content offered by the textbook. We selected two main themes to explore throughout the course with our students: citizenship (marginalized communities and identities), and gender-body questions. A description of each chapter’s general topic and the social justice topics we integrated are outlined in the Appendix.

To effectively build the transition from the textbook to the new materials, we asked our students to critically observe and examine people and places, represented through images and brief informative descriptions that aim to introduce learners to Italian culture and lifestyle. For instance, in the chapter that uses Italian music as a cultural frame, famous Italian singers such as Laura Pausini, Ligabue and Andrea Boccelli were introduced. We asked students to think about the identities represented in the images, how they relate to their own life and reality, what biases they perceived, what image of Italy they convey, and who might be excluded. We then presented something new to our learners paying particular attention to choosing contextualized and authentic texts that they could easily identify and relate to. For instance, we used screenshots from Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or Youtube videos. Figure 1. displays a screenshot of one of Ghali’s Instagram posts that we used to introduce the singer, his famous song “Cara Italia” to explore the issue of citizenship in Italy.

We adopted some of the questions outlined by Compernolle and Abraham to guide our learners in approaching all of the selected materials. First, students were guided to contextualize the text, departing from clues that they were already familiar with. We included questions such as: 1) Where does this screenshot come from?; 2) Who are the typical users of this platform?; 3) What
does the number of likes and followers tell us about this person?; 4) Who is the author and audience of the post?; 5) What is the topic of the post?; 6) What is the tone (formal, informal)?; 7) What are the elements that convey the overall tone and message (punctuation, emoticons, hashtags, colors, fonts, etc.)? These questions foster critical reflection not only in terms of the meaning conveyed by different communication modes, but also on how texts are built. With this awareness in mind, learners can compare a variety of texts, model, negotiate, and independently construct new ones that are relevant to a specific context (Hyland). These questions also encourage students to formulate hypotheses and take risks, moving beyond the goal of giving right/wrong answers that is characteristic of a prescriptive approach to language.

Students also worked on connecting elements of the post to one other. Questioning students on the ways in which a written post is in harmony, or in contradiction, with an illustration helped them critically examine texts and reflect on the structural, functional, situational and cultural elements that together convey meaning. These questions above can be used for different genres presented to introduce a social justice topic in our lessons.

To help learners process the information more easily, and to assist them in their engagement with these materials, there is additional preparation required from our end. The screenshot below (Figure 2) was taken from the worksheet created to analyze and discuss Ghali’s song starting with the album cover. The questions in the activity come with options to choose from, and English translations when needed. This word bank is also useful for other follow-up open ended questions and reflections in class.

**Figure 2. Analysis of Ghali’s album cover**

9. Qual è la differenza tra l’immagine sulla faccia (on the face) e nel sottotono (background)? Che contrasto (contrast) noti (do you notice-note)?
   Una cascata (waterfall), Buio (dark), chiaro (light), surreale (surreal), tranquillità (calmness), tempesta (storm), felicità (happiness), tristezza (sadness), il cielo blu (blue sky), contrasto (contrast), paura (fear), le palme (palm trees), sogno (dream), speranza (hope), passato (past), fulmine (lightning), farfalla (butterfly), il mondo intero (inside world), l’immagine (outside world)
   L’immagine suona mano (hand), anelli (rings), tranquillità

   Background: __________________________
   L’immagine sulla faccia: __________________________
A follow-up question to this activity, such as why Ghali used a butterfly and a UFO to talk about his identities, his positionalities and perception of belonging on his album cover seen above, can help learners to dig deeper in the critical framing stage of the multiliteracies framework. After analyzing Ghali’s Instagram post and album cover, we then moved to the lyrics and video clip of “Cara Italia.” When working on the lyrics, we did not lose sight of the grammar structures presented in the textbook. The following screenshot (Figure 3) shows how we used segments of the lyrics to practice with the negative sentence structure, and visual segments of the videoclip to practice with the passato prossimo.

Figure 3. Activities using parts of the lyrics and videoclip

12. Adesso cambiamo le frasi al passato prossimo usando il negativo.
   1. Cambiano i ministri ma non la minestra. (non...nè...nè)
   2. Vabbè tu aspetta sotto casa. (non...mai)
   3. Mi dici “io sapevo” (I knew it). (non...ancora)
   4. Oh, eh oh, quando il dovere mi chiama. (non...ancora)
   5. Oh eh oh rispondo e dico: io sono già qua. (non...niente)

6. Ghali ha/è preso (prendere) la bandiera e l’ ha/è messa (mettere) sulla cima della montagna.

These strategies allowed learners to familiarize themselves with some important expressions and messages in the lyrics. For instance, question 12 in Figure 3 above, contains key expressions and moments of the song that help learners understand what Ghali aimed to convey. The lines “cambiano i ministri ma non la minestra” and “quando mi dicono va’ a casa, io rispondo e dico: io sono già qua” reference Ghali’s perception of the political situation and the way he perceives to be viewed by others. Once learners familiarize themselves with the meaning, these lines could
be brought up again to be discussed critically. The activities above are examples of situated practice and overt instruction, while a critical discussion of the lyrics is defined as a critical framing activity in the multiliteracies framework.

Question 6 above is a mechanical exercise with the passato prossimo, but the goal is not only to complete the sentence with the correct helping verb; it is also an opportunity to reflect on the image and critically analyze it. For instance, here we can repeat the correct answer, and while doing so, we can also ask a question about it. *Ghali ha preso la bandiera e l’ha messa sulla cima della montagna. Guardiamo lo screenshot. Cosa notate? Dove è questa montagna?* as well as: *Cosa c’è scritto sulla bandiera?* With questions alike, this mechanical looking activity is repurposed to a more meaningful conversation that requires students to critically think and engage with the text. A deeper engagement will then be easier for students since they have received linguistic support and multimodal elements to facilitate meaning and its production.

The activity therefore is not just about placing the correct helping verb and moving on, it is more about placing the correct helping verb to be able to imply it and conceptualize it.

Another activity series used in class is related to the *Non Una di Meno* organization. *Non Una di Meno* is a transnational, transfeminist, and antiracist movement fighting against gender-based violence, promoting social change for marginalized groups against all forms of oppression and exploitment. We departed with this topic from the mimosa image in chapter 8 of the textbook, with festivities as general topic. Students were asked to reflect on Women’s Day as a holiday, and to discuss why or why not they think it should be celebrated. This was followed by a historical overview of the holiday - which offered the opportunity for cross-cultural comparison - and the introduction of the *Non Una Di Meno* movement. The homepage of *Non Una Di Meno*, as well as their Facebook, Instagram and Twitter page, offer a variety of texts that are very appealing from a multiliteracies perspective. Since we discussed this topic in February, around San Valentino, we decided to bring in the relevant and recent posts found on the social media site of this organization. These posts contained a call for the end of patriarchy in relation to the festivity of San Valentino, and included several pictures of fliers attached on city walls in Turin. Figure 4 is the screenshot used with our students.

*Figure 4. Non Una di Meno’s post with flyers for Saint Valentine’s Day.*
This screenshot provides many separate elements to discuss. The pdf versions of the fliers were available to download on the organization’s website; this was an opportunity to discuss the genre of a protest flier and its various components. The post itself above was discussed in class using similar questions we outlined earlier in this paper. We then asked students to engage in a so-called transformed practice activity, that represents the final, fourth type of pedagogical act in the multiliteracies framework. When engaging with a transformed practice activity, after understanding and critically analyzing the material, learners transform it into something else. For this specific activity we asked students to modify or re-design another version of the San Valentino fliers that could be applicable to their own context. While following the structure of the flier, students demonstrated their understanding of the elements characteristic of the flier and created a new meaning to convey their call for social action. Based on what our students did, we saw examples of gender inequalities and calls to stop body shaming, as the type of call for issues that students experienced in their space. This activity took place in class and students only used paper and pencil; a better option for students would be to use online digital tools such as Canvas or Piktochart that offer free customizable templates for a wide variety of genres.

As we ended the chapter on music and started the activities in connection with Non Una di Meno, the San Remo festival was transmitted (live) online. We asked our students to check out some of the performances and share their experience in class. During her performance of “Ogni
volta è così,” Emma gestured with both hands the sign of a triangle for the audience, to bring awareness of the recurring issue of violence against women in Italy. The gesture was originally used in a French protest flier in 1971. After her exhibition, Emma also received some patriarchal comments about her body and way of dressing. Students connected these events to what they analyzed in class, such as the San Valentino fliers from the *Non Una di Meno* organization.

On another occasion, one of Giulia’s students pointed out watching Lorena Cesarini's monologue in response to the racist comments received on social media after she was announced as co-presenter for the Festival di Sanremo 2022. We shared this monologue with the other students, focusing our attention on examples of discrimination through Italian language in comments written on social media. We engaged students in comparing these discriminatory messages with familiar discourses in their L1, noticing differences and similarities.

Additionally, we used one of Mahmood's Facebook posts in class when we talked about music. Our students were very excited to see Mahmood and Blanco win the San Remo Festival as they were already familiar with these Italian artists and their background. These are examples of resources that show how opportunities to address social justice issues are abundant, and easy for students to connect with through technologies especially when popular events are taking place in Italy. These practices also helped us create a more dynamic learning experience where learners and instructors together were able to participate in different discourses (local and global) through which we disassembled the barriers of time and space. While there are many more examples and activity types we would like to discuss, we now turn to concrete examples of how our students engaged with the materials.

### 4. Examples of students’ work

Instagram, Facebook and Twitter posts were very effective with beginner Italian students, as they often contained a manageable amount of text and were accompanied by images, signs, emoticons that together presented rich multimodal texts. The first example of students’ work that we would like to showcase, departed from a screenshot of a Twitter social media account that we shared with students (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Tweet opinion on Gaia Romani’s use of “assessora”
Assessore- council member

Cosa intende Brando Benifei con “ma queste persone non hanno altro a cui pensare?”

This twitter post shows a picture of Gaia Romani, an assessor, changing her profession tag on her office door to the female form. The written text that accompanies the tweet is an opinion of a user who talks about others expressing their dislike of Gaia Romani’s actions. Students were presented with this tweet and some vocabulary words to understand the content of the message. Then, in one of the composition prompts, students were asked to reply to this Twitter post and express their opinion about it. We included different Twitter/Facebook posts similar to the one above, to expose learners to more and diverse opinions. The following example of Elena showcases a beginner (second semester) students' engagement with the question on gendered language. This is also a great example to see her level of linguistic competence in expressing her opinion and critical reflection. In Figure 6 we see Elena’s reply to the Tweet located on the first slide on the right side. Elena used a Twitter generator app to create her reply that looks exactly like a real Tweet post.
In class, students read brief segments of Vera Gheno’s book titled *Femminili singolari*. We can notice how Elena started her reply by taking a position using Vera Gheno’s words, followed by her own statement expressing the view that female names of professions should be used. Elena’s point of view is also in line with Vera Gheno’s perspective as Vera Gheno’s quote follows “così non contribuirai alla sua registrazione.” Elena then points out the problem of having *dottora* in the dictionary as an existing word that therefore it is in use, yet, how its masculine form is the most common for both genders. Elena’s composition demonstrates how she was able to creatively apply what she learned. She moved beyond comprehending the text and cultural
perspectives by taking a step beyond, bringing her background knowledge and ideas. Thus, her work demonstrates an interaction with the text from a speaker’s perspective, incorporated with her own world views (Kern). This type of skill that she acquired, differs from a communicative language teaching (CLT) pedagogy goal that often focuses on language usage. Language usage in the CLT is an engagement of text in order to comprehend text and reflect on the linguistic usage presented in the text. CLT is for discussing the meaning of the text for individual self-expression purposes (Paesani et al.). Instead, here we have a demonstration of language use that entails the analysis of the text and the production of a new text that is meaningful. It is a result of a collaborative interpretation (collective social engagement with different text) that demonstrates Elena’s reflection. As she produced the new text she reflected on language and the relation of language to the world and to herself (Kern 49).

After engaging with several social justice topics and various materials throughout the course, at the end of the semester students chose one they felt most interested in and created a final project to present at the end of the course. Figure 6. is a set of screenshots of two final presentations exploring Ghali’s music compared to other musicians.

Figure 6. Empathizing with other culture

La posizione di Ghali

Parlando di Ghali è un musulmano in un paese cattolico e sta cercando di aumentare la consapevolezza delle lotte dell'essere musulmano attraverso la sua musica.

Ghali sta usando la sua voce e la sua fama per assicurarsi che il trattamento dei musulmani in Italia cambi e che nessuno in futuro debba passare attraverso lo stesso controllo che ha subito da bambino e da star del rap nascente.
The first group in this example compared the music of Kendrick Lamar and Ghali. They noted similarities and differences in the way these two singers address social issues. The slide on Ghali explains that he is a Muslim “in a country of Catholics”. These students reflected on and highlighted what might entail being part of a minority group in Italy. The second presentation is an individual final presentation of a student who compared Ghali’s music with Hozier’s music. Similarly, to the previous group, this student departed from something relevant to her own life. In both cases we see how as learners worked with a project of their choice, they incorporated their new experiences and cultural knowledge with their previous personal interests. As a result, learners created their worlds by going through a process of empathizing with the other culture, specifically with the social issues present in similar or different ways from the ones they were already familiar with. Another example of how students connected their own experiences with the new cultural engagement is a work of two students who explored children’s book and their representation of gender.

*Figure 7. Gender in children’s books*

The two slides above are the first ones of their presentation. On the slide to the left we see the starting question students asked their classmates. We noticed the use of the asterisk in the adjective bambin*. The use of inclusive language is absent from the Italian textbook, however, in class we discussed different ways of addressing nonbinary individuals, such as the schwa and asterisk. The engagement with these practices had an impact on the learners as they started to use it (while also keeping the masculine and feminine forms). On the slide to the right, similarly
to the previous slides on Ghali, learners created connections with their personal experiences. More specifically, they explain how they never felt fully represented in children’s’ books. We noticed a pattern in students’ presentations. As students compared, contrasted their presentations, they intertwined their previous experiences with the newly acquired information. The examples above, while showcasing some of the students’ ability to write in Italian, do not demonstrate the critical analysis that they carried out, as they are the first two introductory slides. However, on the slides that followed, these students analyzed the language used in the American children book, they noticed new stereotypes they had not noticed before and provided examples of more inclusive books that exist in English and in Italian. While they consulted with us to receive help in finding resources, they also carried out their own research. For instance, on one of their slides they included an Italian book review that they discussed during their presentation. This shows that as learners were exposed to different genres in class, they gained new skills in looking, seeing and using other genres for their meaning making purposes. None of these students used Wikipedia pages to create their presentation, they all engaged in finding new and exciting resources, going beyond presenting surface information. The majority of the final presentations and other activities similar to those we discussed earlier in this paper, are in line with the principles of the multiliteracies approaches, as they contain situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice elements. Now, we would like to turn our attention to how we approached reflections, an essential component of our activity design.

5. Reflections through Flipgrid
Reflection and critical reflection are essential steps in a transformative pedagogy of social justice, which carries the goal of turning students’ reflection into action (Taylor et al. 86). Reflecting on how textual knowledge, engagement with text and language use relate to the context and the learners themselves help their development of critical thinking (Paesani et al.). However, reflection is often overlooked in formal learning settings, especially because it is something that “we cannot directly observe, and which is unique to the learner” (Boud et al. 8).
Previous studies have found structured reflection to be valuable for culture and language learning and reflection has been found to be a chance for learners to connect and reflect on their learning in the classroom (Crane, Sosulski). Through reflections, learners challenge their prior assumptions and personal experiences, eventually triggering a shift in learners’ beliefs and perspectives (Crane and Sosulski). As learners engage with different social justice topics throughout the course, they formulate opinions, express their concern, emotions or shape their (imagined) actions. Not only do they acquire new knowledge, but they build connections with it bringing their own individual stories. Thus, students’ reflections represent opportunities to increase their emancipatory potential as well (Tarnawska Senel), and it is important to provide learners with a space where they can engage in reflective practices.
Flipgrid is a video and audio-based learning platform for discussions, presentations, reflections, and other uses; it facilitates collaboration among learners, fostering community building and online student engagement (Dettinger). Throughout the course we created 7 Flipgrid reflection activities. For the first part of the Flipgrid assignments we asked students to answer to a prompt
in Italian, and for the second part they had the opportunity to reflect on the questions we
provided, related to the social justice materials we discussed in class.
In these reflections we were able to learn about our learners’ engagement with the topics and it
gave us a better understanding of how learners positioned themselves in relation to these topics.
The following example showcases an example of the recurring themes in students’ reflections
as they engaged with the social justice materials. In this example Bella not only recognizes
inequity in his own context besides Italy, but she also reflects on possible actions she and others
around her can do in order to create a better society:

*My first reaction to the post we saw was a lot of curiosity. It was really interesting to learn more
about that and how Ghali showed how to be open and accepting of others. We need to work on
being more open and kinder to each other and make it easier for everyone to transition into
these different times. (Bella)*

Similar to many other students’ reactions we had in our classes, Flipgrid for Bella provided a
space to connect with others, express and process her experiences, opinions, desires and
thoughts in her first language, but it also helped her gain new curiosities and interest in Italian.
As follows, we discuss some additional benefits, as well as our vision for future possibilities.

### 6. Benefits, challenges and future directions

In this article we have proposed the use of multiliteracies framework to incorporate social justice
materials into an already existing curriculum for beginner Italian students. Through the outline
of the activities, the examples of students’ engagement and their reflections, we demonstrated
that it cannot only be possible, successful and fulfilling to implement social justice topics in the
beginner classes, but it can also result in engaging learners in unforeseen ways. The examples
demonstrated in this paper challenge the belief that beginner learners are unable to engage with
more complex topics, such as social justice related texts. Learners in our courses expressed
strong interest in connecting with communities throughout their engagement with multimodal
texts, which further supports previous studies discussing how for beginner learners it is
important to build connections (Urlaub and Bourns). Connection and Communities as a
language learning goal so far received little attention in research (Magnan et al.), even though
it is described as one of the goals of the Standards in ACTFL. In some cases, learners in our
study went even beyond the course requirements and initiated connections with the outside
world, outside of classroom doors, demonstrating a transformation in their perspectives, attitude
and beliefs (Negretto and Gaspar).

We argue that teaching practices focusing on the use of the language simply to be instrumental
or with a functional purpose is not enough for our language learners. Clearly, foreign language
teachers cannot convert their courses entirely, and there is a limit of time as there is never enough
time, however, our experience and the examples demonstrated here show that the time
incorporated into this project for both instructors and learners were beneficial. Another
drawback might be that instructors might want to stay away from topics that can bring up political scenarios. Yet, we should remember that choosing not to bring up these social justice topics is also defined as an action of resistance, as nothing in language learning and teaching is neutral or apolitical (Anya, Pennycook). The classroom is a social and cultural domain intertwined with cultural and social worlds outside of the classroom walls (Canagarajah). The learner focused pedagogy described in this paper shows how students were able to relate the topics discussed in class, reflected on the world around them and the effects of these topics to themselves in meaningful, creative and critical ways. As we have demonstrated with the examples, students were able to create a collection of personalized and personal experiences through which they expressed their emotions. It also helped them create greater connection between their own and distant spaces in a meaningful way. By doing so they were able to erase the foreign from their language learning experience that may open up new opportunities, transformations and continued engagement with the language.

Implementing activities where students are not required to have a right or wrong answer can be challenging from a teacher and student perspective. Many students do not want to feel exposed in front of the whole classroom or may feel shy to give a direct response to the teacher. The instructor, on the other hand, may misinterpret silence as a form of student disengagement. To avoid unproductive learning dynamics and make students’ feel comfortable engaging with the materials highlighted above, there are several strategies to use. Flipgrid is certainly a space where students can reflect and interact with one another without feeling peer pressured during class time. Additionally, when addressing social justice topics, a multimodal approach to students’ reflections encourages L2 educators to direct their attention on the multilayered process rather than just the content-outcome conveyed through language. This allows teachers to connect to their students more in depth, while also ensuring that students’ perspectives are really heard and seen.

Worksheets, as another type of resource besides Flipgrid, are an effective tool to foster collaboration. For example, Google Docs that are prepared with questions and instructions, presented with the learners’ L1’s incorporated (when and where needed), can be a successful way to engage students in a form of collaborative small group work. Hypothesis.com is another useful digital space where students can collaboratively read and comment on a shared text in the target language - whether it’s a social media post, an ad, a website page, or an online article.

While the web offers an immense variety of texts to choose from, it takes time to search for the “right” texts. Instructors often fear texts are too difficult or too easy for their learners from a language proficiency standpoint. However, when adopting multiliteracies approaches instructors should know that any text could be used: it all depends on the questions that we would like to ask. For example, asking students to comprehend a whole article in Italian on the Slow Food website, merely focusing on written language, is very challenging for an elementary level. Verbal components are only one portion of the larger, multimodal system of communication in which they exist co-constructively with the context. Asking learners, instead, to experience the text (feelings, emotions, genre, etc.), observing the layout and the all the visual components that contextualize it (colors, logos, images, fonts, etc.), form hypotheses based on the non-verbal elements, reflect on how the headlines connect to the visuals, and compare it to
a text with similar content to analyze how the text is built with a specific audience in mind, help develop multiple skills in addition to language. For instance, the Slow Food movement is a topic that offers students opportunities to connect with a variety of environmental and social justice issues. Having students peruse the Slow Food’s Italian website, then compare it to the Slow Food’s US website, enables learners to connect with real-world social movements and communities in multiple countries, develop cross-cultural awareness, and create new texts that can be used to promote social change in their own communities. While it takes time to change, change is now more possible than ever, thanks to the diverse materials available at our fingertips. Therefore, we look forward to seeing successful new projects developed in our field to diversify Italian language education.

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**Appendix**

| Capitolo 7 | Italian music | “Cara Italia” by Ghali addressing issues of citizenship and belonging. |
| Capitolo 8 | Festivities and holidays | Women’s Day; Non Una di Meno feminist activist association. Images and infographics addressing issues of domestic violence and femicide. |
| Capitolo 9 | Job and Professions | Names of professions, sexism, examples of inclusivity in Italian language. |
| Capitolo 10 | Body and well being | The Slow Food movement and fair food in Italy and in the US |

*Table 1. Social justice topics incorporated for each chapter*
Capitolo 11 | House and space | Linguistic landscapes, including Italian former colony city of Asmara (Eritrea). Protests in public spaces (Italian balconies, graffiti); comparisons of protest between Italy and the US.

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